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SUBJECT: Paktika: Remote Gomal District Faces Security,
Economic, and Governance Challenges

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1. (SBU) Summary: Gomal District Administrator Musa Jan is concerned that lack of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Coalition Forces (CF) control of roads passing from South Waziristan through Gomal allows Taliban forces free access to the district and points north and west. Some villages are reportedly standing up to the Taliban; however, the brother of a Paktika parliamentarian was recently killed in a Taliban-related incident. Schools are functioning but without adequate textbooks and possibly in collaboration with the Taliban. There is no public health clinic and only one private doctor. Residents rejected voter registration, the district administrator reported, but the Independent Election Commission (IEC) may provide a second opportunity to register following his engagement with the people. Increased ANSF attention to Gomal could bring security benefits that extend well beyond the district, but Gomal is likely to remain isolated and underdeveloped for the foreseeable future.
End summary.

Rare PRT Visit to Isolated District

2. (SBU) The PRT Paktika (Sharana) command team visited Paktika's Gomal district, bordering Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal agency March 25-27 to meet with District Administrator Musa Jan and assess recent developments in security, governance, and development. The PRT reached Gomal overland from Bermel district after an eight-hour drive that punctured four tires on three of the convoy's four mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles and illustrated the difficulty of maneuvering in Paktika's rugged and mountainous terrain in such vehicles. Gomal, along with Paktika's southern border districts Wor Mamay and Terwa, receives few visits and little development assistance from the PRT (and almost none from the international community) owing to challenges of security and accessibility. Upon reaching Gomal's district center, the PRT saw that the solar panels had been stolen from all street lights previously provided by Coalition Forces, and only a handful of shops appeared to be operating in the small bazaar across from the district center.

Patrolling Roads Key Measure to Improve Security

3. (U) Musa Jan, who was appointed district administrator three months ago following a long vacancy in this position, is a Gomal native whose cousin has served as district administrator in several other districts of Paktika. His father was the leader of a larger regional jurisdiction before the creation of the current provincial administrative

boundaries. Musa Jan said patrolling Gomal's roads, all of which are unpaved, was the most needed step to improve security. The road leading from Angoor Ada, straddling the border with South Waziristan, and passing through Shkin to Gomal, was key, he said, as Taliban use this road to pass unimpeded through Gomal to points north and west. Musa Jan complained that local ANSF and U.S. forces based at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Curry were not taking measures to secure the road. He added that enemy use of the road feeds insecurity in neighboring Sarobi and Charbaran district, and Omna district to the north. (Note: Charbaran and Omna district centers were overrun by enemy forces in September and November 2008, respectively. While the Afghan National Police (ANP) has made a tenuous return to Omna and a new district administrator was appointed, the Charbaran district center remains destroyed and abandoned.)

Taliban Active, but Some Villages Standing up Against Them

14. (U) Musa Jan said that Afghans from Helmand and Kandahar, as well as foreign fighters (including Chechens, Pakistanis, and Arabs), are active in Gomal and their commander is a Gomal native. According to Musa Jan, Taliban have created a shadow government in Gomal and are paid to assassinate GIROA workers. Asked whether Taliban are administering justice in Gomal, Musa Jan said residents close to the district center come to him for dispute resolution, while those farther away turn to the Taliban. He noted that several villages (Khair Mindzay, Babu Khel, Aman Khel, and Kormakay) are standing up to Taliban. The district ANP chief added that USAID-supplied winterization kits were distributed to the intended neediest recipients in Gomal, with some remaining blankets saved for distribution by ANSF and CF patrols. Comment: The USAID

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-procured kits were distributed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. End Comment.]

15. (SBU) Asked about a recent incident in which the brother of Paktika Mesharano Jirga (upper house of parliament) Member Mohammad Hassan was reportedly killed by Taliban in Gomal, Musa Jan explained that Mohammad Hassan had sold wheat donated by an (unnamed) NGO because it was impossible to deliver the wheat to Gomal and had sent the money to be distributed by his representative to the people. According to Musa Jan, when Taliban learned of the money, they stole it from his representative; Mohammad Hassan sent his brother to recover the money and the brother and one of his friends were killed in the ensuing incident. (Note: After speaking with the PRT and Governor Katawazay, Mohammad Hasan traveled independently to Gomal on March 19 to talk with local residents about the incident and encourage them to stand up against Taliban harassment.)

Schools Unsupplied but Functioning, Possibly with Taliban Complicity

16. (U) Regarding public services, Musa Jan said 36 schools were expected to open for the new school year, although they had old textbooks for grades one through six only. One madrassa in Khair Mindzay village was functioning, as well as one girls' school with approximately 60 students. Musa Jan was unable to confirm, but considered plausible, information provided to the PRT in October by the provincial education director, who said that local schools had reached accommodation with the Taliban to teach only the Quran, and that Taliban had posed as teachers to collect salaries. There is no public health clinic in the district, although one doctor operates privately in the bazaar. Most of Gomal's population survives on subsistence farming or woodcutting. He added that many men work abroad in Pakistan, Iran, Dubai, or Saudi Arabia. Musa Jan named a clinic, mosques, support for schools, and cell phone coverage as the most important development needs. He requested the PRT supply rugs, loudspeakers, and solar lights for many mosques in the district.

¶7. (U) Musa Jan said no line directorates (provincial-level ministry offices) are represented in Gomal except for an education director who resides far from the district center and whom he believes to be connected with the Taliban. Asked about upcoming elections, Musa Jan said Gomal residents rejected voter registration in December-January because they disliked their elected officials. He said he met with the shuras of Gomal as well as neighboring Charbaran (officially a part of Gomal) district and convinced the people to participate in elections. He said he had requested the Provincial Election Official (PEO) to reopen a voter registration center in Gomal so people who had changed their minds could still register. (Note: PEO Taj Ali Waziri told State PRT Officer on April 6 that all districts that made such requests would have the opportunity for deployment of mobile registration units, with a focus on unofficial districts.) With the arrival of warm weather, Musa Jan was concerned security for voter registration would be a bigger problem. He noted that he had little ability to communicate with the provincial government, since there is no cell phone coverage, his satellite phone is broken, and there is no CODAN radio. He admitted that he found little profit in being a district administrator and was considering leaving his position to work as a contractor for CF.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) Although sparsely populated and remote, Gomal district has strategic importance for its long border with South Waziristan, across which enemy forces at present are reported to pass freely into Afghanistan. The district has long suffered from relative neglect and little governance. Increased Afghan Army presence in Gomal could bring security benefits to areas well beyond the district if key roads can be secured. However, Gomal's remoteness will likely ensure that it continues to lag in Governance and development for the foreseeable future. Until greater gains in governance and development can be pursued, identification of and support for villages and tribal groups that are reportedly opposing the Taliban could reinforce ANSF and CF efforts.

¶9. (U) PRT Sharana Commander, Maneuver Battalion commander and the DOS Regional Advisor for Task Force Yukon have reviewed this cable.

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